

In the Claims:

Please replace claims 1, 6, 8, 15, 17, 23, and 24 with the claims below having the same numbers, and add claim 25.

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1. (Once Amended) In a computerized 3D graphical image rendering system for performing visible surface determination, a method of generating depth information, comprising the steps of:

- representing depth information by a piecewise function;
- upon receiving a primitive object, dividing the primitive object according to areas defined by at least one analytic function;
- performing a visibility test based on depth information for the areas; and
- updating the piecewise function based on the results of the visibility test.

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6. (Once Amended) The method of claim 5 wherein the dynamic search structure is a tree-based structure:

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8. (Once Amended) An apparatus for generating depth information, comprising:

- a first module for representing depth information by a piecewise function;
- a second module for dividing a primitive object according to areas defined by at least one analytic function upon receiving the primitive object;
- a third module for performing visibility test based on depth information for the areas; and
- a fourth module for updating the piecewise function based on any results of the visibility test.

15. (Once Amended) An apparatus for performing visible surface determination of 3D images defined by a plurality of primitive objects and associated depth information, comprising:

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a span generator for generating spans for each of the primitive objects, a span corresponding to each horizontal scan line occupied by the primitive object, the span characterized by positional data and depth data; and

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a visible surface determination module responsive to the depth data associated with each of the spans, for determining visible segments of each of the spans by comparing depth information for each span with depth information defined by an area represented by a piecewise function, and for generating position data corresponding to each of the visible segments of each of the spans.

17. (Once Amended) A system for performing visible surface determination on 3D images defined by a plurality of primitive objects and associated depth information, comprising:

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a processing device;
a display device coupled to the processing device for displaying the 3D images;
a graphics engine coupled to the processing device for performing visible surface determination by comparing depth information for a span with depth information defined by an area represented by a piecewise function; and
a storage device for storing results of the visible surface determination,
wherein regions of the primitive objects and the associated depth information are defined by analytical functions.

23. (Once Amended) A computer readable medium having embodied thereon a program, the program being executable by a machine to perform method steps for performing visible surface determination, the method steps comprising:

representing depth information of a primitive object by a piecewise function;
upon receiving the primitive object, dividing the primitive object according to areas defined by at least one analytic function;
performing a visibility test based on depth information for the areas; and
updating the piecewise function based on the results of the visibility test.

24. (Once Amended) A system for performing visible surface determination on 3D images defined by a plurality of primitive objects and associated depth information, comprising:

means for representing depth information by a piecewise function;
upon receiving a primitive object, means for dividing the primitive object according to areas defined by at least one analytic function;
means for performing a visibility test based on depth information for the areas;
and
means for updating the piecewise function based on the results of the visibility test.

25. (New) In a computerized 3D graphical image rendering system for performing visible surface determination, a method of generating depth information, comprising the steps of:

upon receiving a primitive object, dividing the primitive object into areas delimited by splits, wherein splits are defined by analytic functions;
representing depth information for at least one of the areas by an analytic function; and
performing a visibility test based on depth information for the areas.